BATMAN
483
US $1.25
CAN $1.50
AUG 92
APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY
INTRODUCING...
CRASH & BURN!
HANNIBAL/APARO
Scanned by Gizgel

CRASH & BURN
A LOVE STORY
MAYBE IT WAS THE WAY HE CAME INTO MY LIFE, COUPLED WITH THE QUIRK OF MY OWN NAME. OR MAYBE MY FATHER REALLY WAS TO BLAME -- IN BOTH WAYS, GENETICS AND ENVIRONMENT.
THEN AGAIN MAYBE IT WAS PURE GREED -- OR SOME INFECTION OF EVIL, WITH OR WITHOUT THE "D" IN FRONT OF IT.
BUT PROBABLY IT WAS JUST BOREDOM.
5¼"
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BOB KANE CREATOR

BATMAN 483, August, 1992. Published monthly by DC Comics Inc., 1325 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10019. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to BATMAN, DC Comics Subscriptions, P.O. Box 0528, Baldwin, NY 11510. Annual subscription rate $15.00. Canadian subscribers must add $8.00 for postage and GST. GST # is R125921072. All other foreign countries must add $12.00 for postage. U.S. funds only. Copyright © 1992 DC Comics Inc. All Rights Reserved. All characters featured in this issue, the distinctive likenesses thereof, and all related indicia are trademarks of DC Comics Inc. The stories, characters and incidents mentioned in this magazine are entirely fictional. Advertising Representative: Print Advertising Representatives, 355 Lexington Avenue, New York, NY 10017 (212) 949-6850. Printed in Canada.
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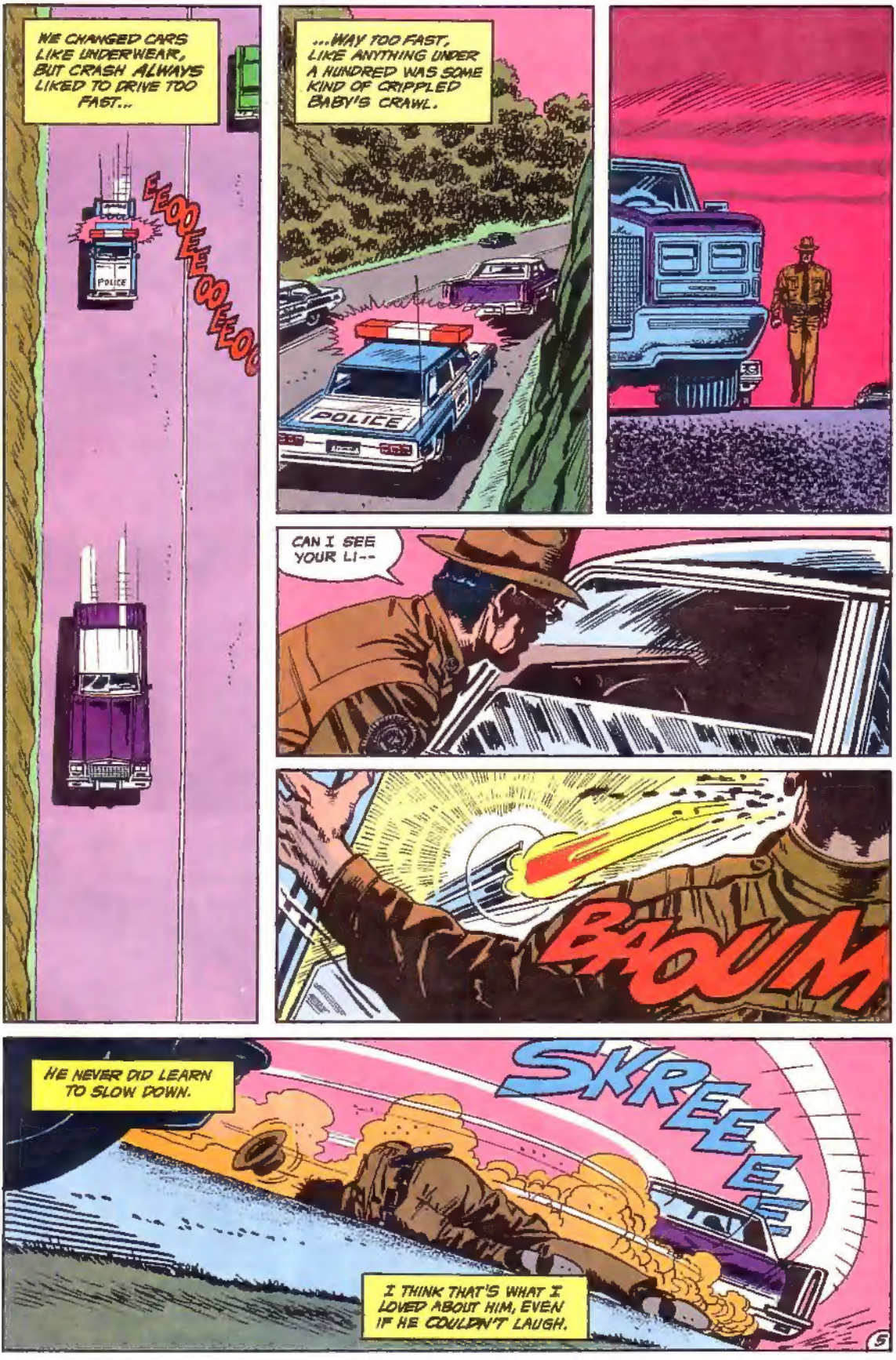
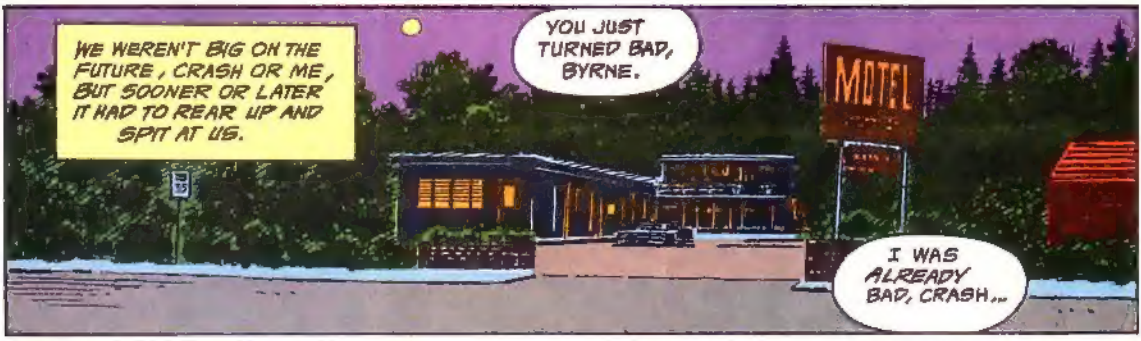
G-7594

HE CAME OUT OF THE FOUR-BY-FOUR LIKE SOME SPRINGSHOT JUNGLE BRUTE ON DOUBLE STEROIDS.
EVERYBODY DOWN! NO ALARMS, NO BOOBYTRAPS, NO MARKED CASH!
MY KNEES WENT A BIT WEAK, BUT THEY DIDN'T BUCKLE...
AND NO STUPIDITY!
BAOUM
AHRRR
...CERTAINLY NOT LIKE THE GUARD'S.
STILL, THAT'S WHEN I KNEW...
YOU-- THE CASH-- UNMARKED-- AND MOVE IT!
...IT WAS HEAT AT FIRST SIGHT.
IT'S NOT THAT IT SEEMED LIKE THE RIGHT THING TO DO.
IT WAS SUDDENLY THE ONLY THING...
2

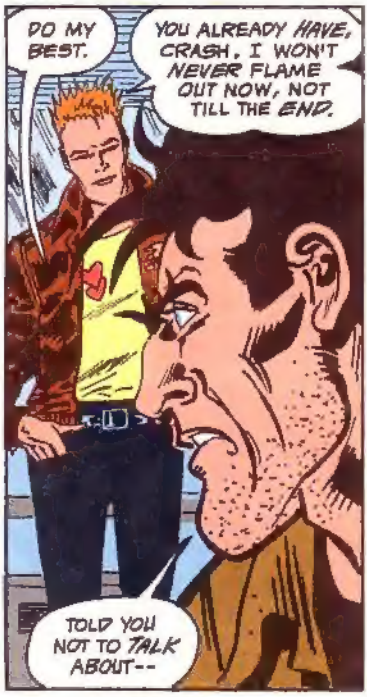
SEE, HE WAS JUST THE SPARK I NEEDED TO BURN.
NOT SO FAST, CRASH. THERE MIGHT BE A PAINT-BOMB IN HERE.
MAKE ME CARRY IT FOR YOU--AS A GESTURE OF GOOD FAITH.
YOU CRAZY?
YOU BET.
JUST LIKE YOU, CRASH.
HE DIDN'T KNOW WHAT TO MAKE OF ME, AND I LIKED THAT--POWER OVER SUCH POWER.
YOU EVEN LOOK AT ME CROOKED...
...AND YOUR HAIR GETS A LOT REDDER.
PROMISES, PROMISES.
AND HURRY UP IF YOU'RE COMIN!
UH-UH--FIRST I HAVE TO PUT IN MY RESIGNATION.
JANET BYRNE.
FLTCH
JANET BYRNE
3

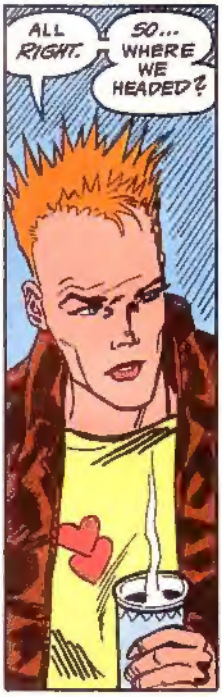
THOSE WERE THE MARKED BILLS.
HE NEVER LAUGHED -- NO SENSE OF HUMOR -- BUT IT WAS HIS FIRST REAL SMILE, AND IT'D DO.
NOT THAT ONE, BYRNE -- I JUST STOLE IT FOR THE JOB.
RIGHT.
SO LONG, SHIRLEY, EDNA... DOUBT I'LL BE WRITING, BUT DON'T FORGET TO CALL AN AMBULANCE FOR FRANK THERE.
THE RED PORSCHE, BYRNS.
BAOUM
BANK OF MIAMI
MIAMI POLICE
BANK
SKRASHH
SKREEEE
BETTER WHEELS THAN THE ONES YOU STOLE, CRASH.
YEAH...
FWHOOM
..'CEPT THESE ARE STOLEN TOO.
SKREEEEE
I STARTED LAUGHING AND KEPT IT UP TILL IT WASN'T FUNNY ANYMORE.
WE CLEARED MIAMI BY SUNSET, BUT I WAS STILL LAUGHING AND CRASH HAD TO SLUG ME BEFORE I COULD STOP.
IT GOT TOO QUIET THEN, SO HE PULLED OVER AND KISSED ME. I WANTED TO LAUGH AGAIN, MAYBE FOREVER, BUT INSTEAD I CRIED. AND THAT'S HOW IT STARTED BETWEEN US, LAUGHTER AND TEARS FOR ME, DEAD SILENCE FROM HIM.
4


WE CHANGED CARS LIKE UNDERWEAR, BUT CRASH ALWAYS LIKED TO DRIVE TOO FAST...
EEOOEEOOEEOO
POLICE
...WAY TOO FAST, LIKE ANYTHING UNDER A HUNDRED WAS SOME KIND OF CRIPPLED BABY'S CRAWL.
POLICE
CAN I SEE YOUR LI--
BAOUM
HE NEVER DID LEARN TO SLOW DOWN.
SKREEE
I THINK THAT'S WHAT I LOVED ABOUT HIM, EVEN IF HE COULDN'T LAUGH.
5

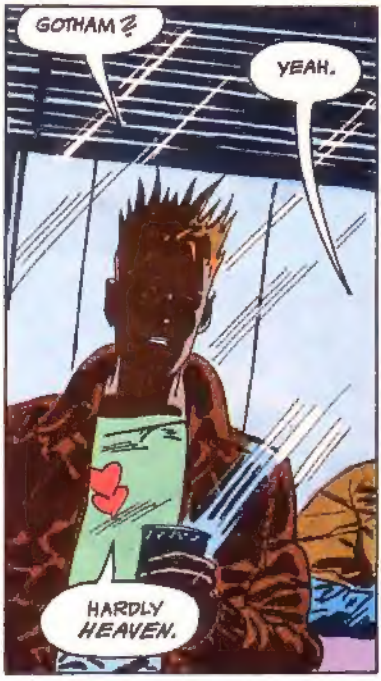

WE WEREN'T BIG ON THE FUTURE, CRASH OR ME, BUT SOONER OR LATER IT HAD TO REAR UP AND SPIT AT US.
YOU JUST TURNED BAD, BYRNE.
MOTEL
I WAS ALREADY BAD, CRASH...

...WANTIN' TO RIP THAT BANK EVER SINCE THEY SLAPPED MY NAME-TAG ON.
I JUST NEED A GOOD SPARK, BABY. THAT'S ALL I EVER NEED.


DO MY BEST.
YOU ALREADY HAVE, CRASH. I WON'T NEVER FLAME OUT NOW, NOT TILL THE END.
TOLD YOU NOT TO TALK ABOUT--


ALL RIGHT.
SO... WHERE WE HEADED?

THEY SAY HELL'S SOUTH.
FIGURE WE'LL KEEP GOIN' NORTH -- TO THE BIG CITY.


GOTHAM?
YEAH.
HARDLY HEAVEN.

PROB'LY NOT, BYRNE... BUT AS GOOD A PLACE AS ANY TO CRASH.
KCHAK
SEE, THAT'S THE THING ABOUT THE FUTURE -- IT'S HARD TO AVOID.

WE KEPT HEADING NORTH ANYWAY...
AND HOW WOULD YOU LIKE THAT?
TWENTIES AND TENS WILL BE--
...WITH STOPS ALONG THE WAY.
BLASH
PASS BOOK
WE'RE CRASH AND BURN! DO YOURSELVES A FAVOR AND DON'T DO AS WE DO!
DO AS WE SAY--AND LIVE A WHILE!
EVERYBODY DOWN!!

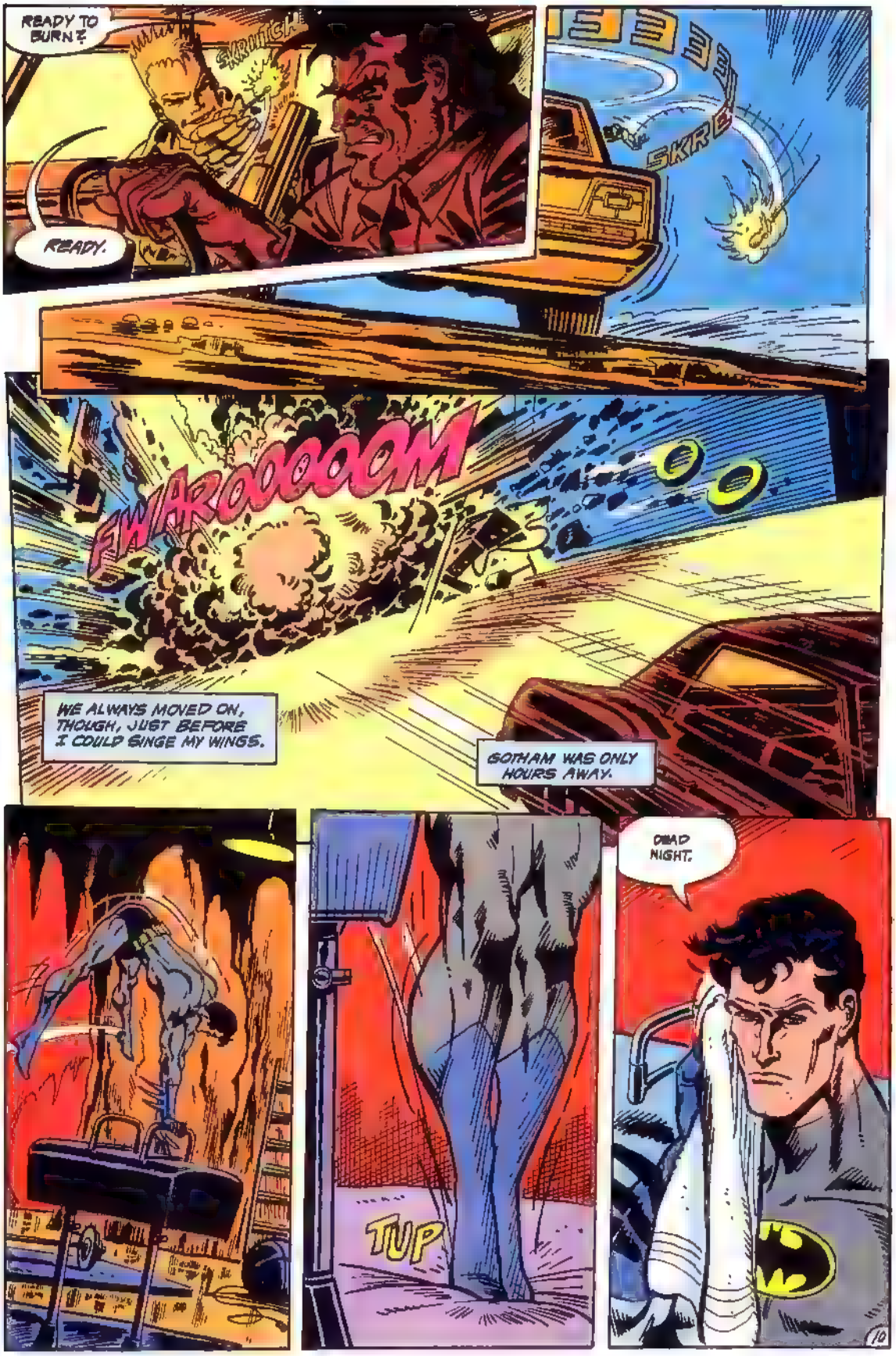
NO ALARMS, NO BOOBY-TRAPS, AND NO MARKED BILLS!
I... P-PLEASE...
SHUT UP AND STUFF THAT MONEY!

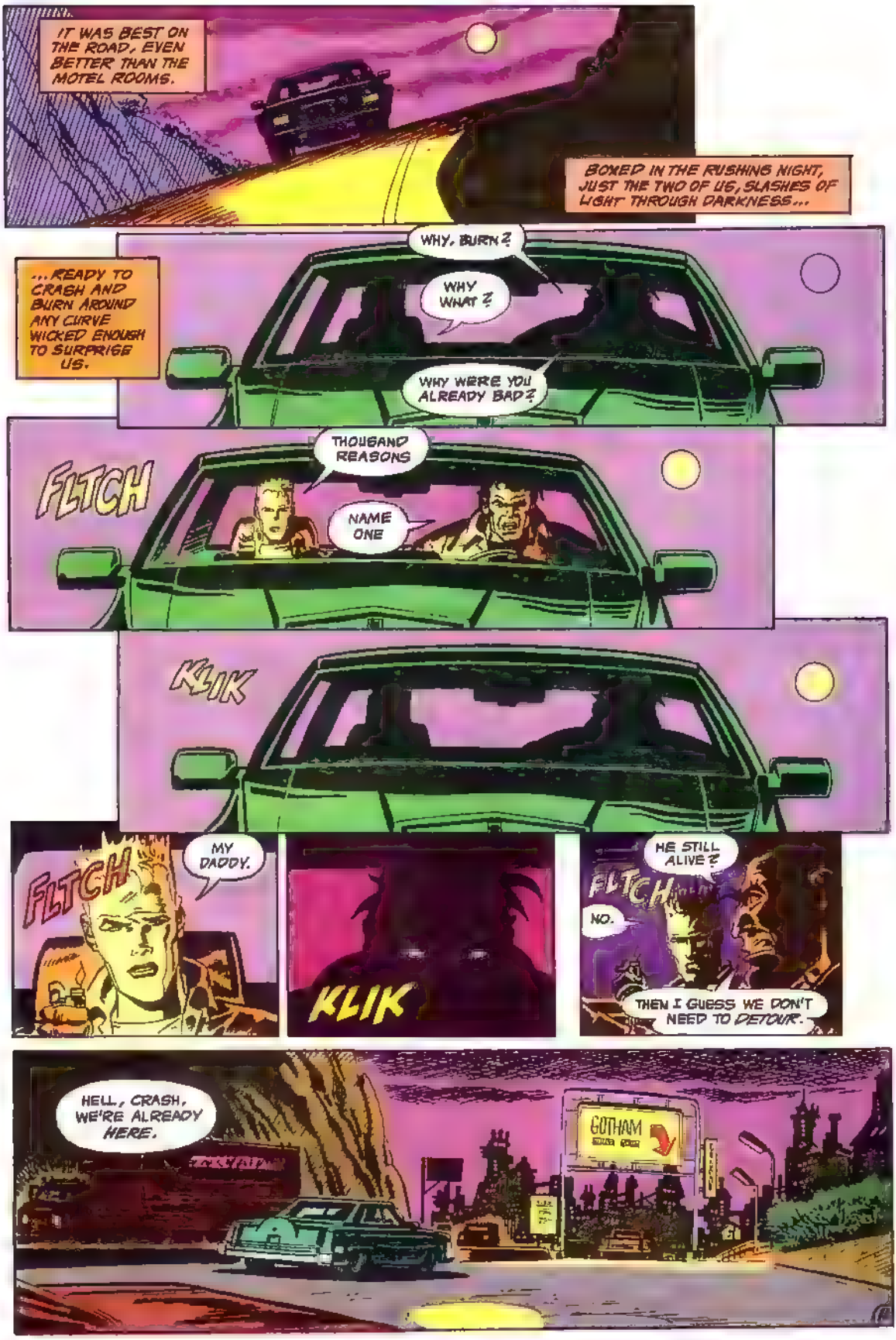
CRASH HAD BEEN IN THE SPECIAL FORCES, WHERE KNOWLEDGE OF INCENDIARY DEVICES WAS CONSIDERED ESSENTIAL...
LET'S FLY, BURN!
FLICK
...AND I'D BEEN TO A DOZEN MOTELS, WHERE I PROVED TO BE A QUICK STUDY.

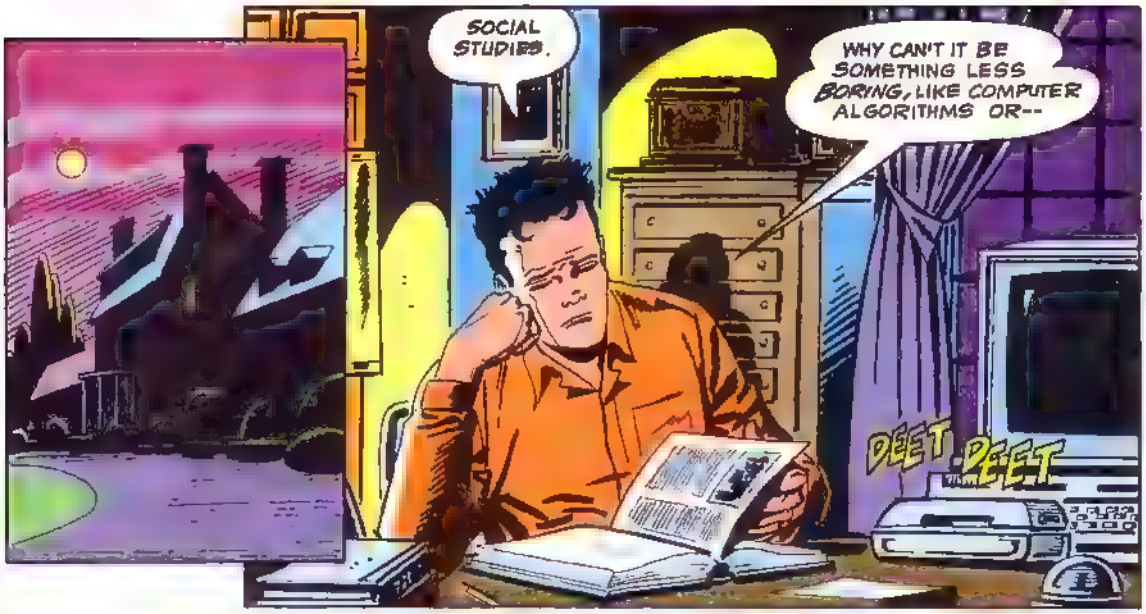
WE MADE A GOOD PAIR, A CLASSIC TEAM...
EEEEEEEE
FWOOOSH
...TIGHT AND RIGHT, LIKE BREAD AND BUTTER.

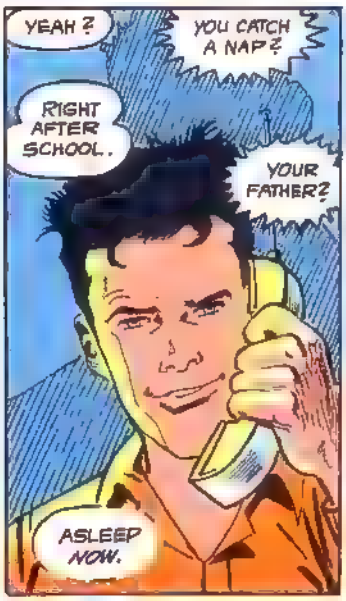
--SOUND WORSE THAN BONNIE AND CLYDE.
THEY SEEM BENT ON SUICIDE, COMMISSIONER, AS IF THEY KNOW THEY'RE DOOMED AND JUST WANT TO GO OUT IN FLAMES...
BUT SO FAR NO ONE'S BEEN ABLE TO ACCOMMODATE THEM IN SIX STATES.
HNH.
MORE RUTHLESS AND BRUTAL, THAT'S FOR CERTAIN...
G.C.P.D.
OTHER THAN WHAT YOU'VE ALREADY TOLD ME ABOUT THEIR M.O., MONTOYA, WHAT ELSE IS KNOWN ABOUT THEM?
NOT MUCH--UNKNOWN MALE AND A FEMALE ACCOMPLICE NAMED JANET BYRNE.
A BANK TELLER WHO JOINED HIM IN THE MIDDLE OF A MIAMI ROBBERY.
FIGURES.
THE "BURN" OF CRASH AND BURN.
AND BEST FOR LAST, COMMISSIONER--THEY'RE ON A CRASH-COURSE FOR GOTHAM.
8

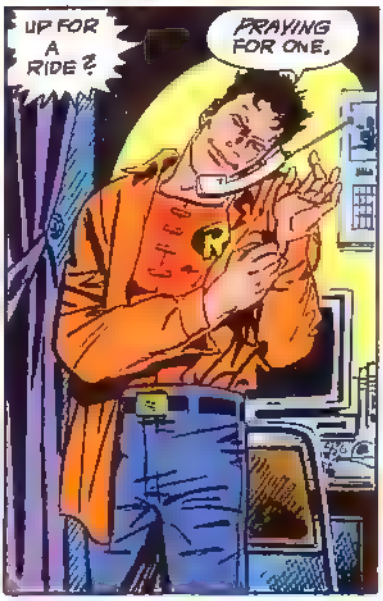
WE SELDOM STOPPED MOVING, BURNING A LOT OF FUEL, AND SOMETIMES I FELT LIKE A MOTH, THE GAS STATIONS SPLASHES OF IRRESISTIBLE LIGHT.
TANK'S STILL HALF-FULL.
JOE'S SERVICE CENTER
GAS
WAY I SEE IT, CRASH, IT'S HALF-EMPTY.
CHRASH!
WHUH..?
YOUR MONEY--FAST! AND OPEN THE PUMPS!
LET'S FLY, BURN.
FSHSHSHSHSH
CHUNK
CHUNK
9

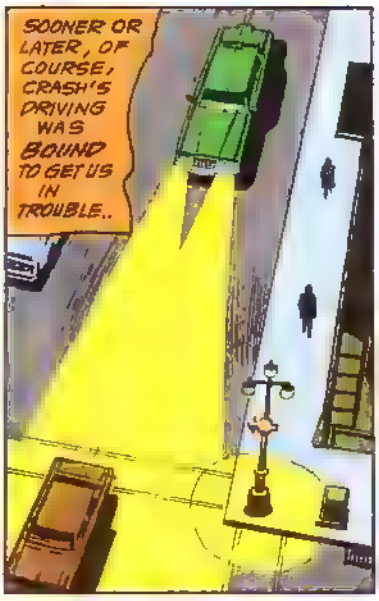

READY TO BURN?
SKRUTCH
READY.
SKRE
FWAROOOOOOM
WE ALWAYS MOVED ON, THOUGH, JUST BEFORE I COULD SINGE MY WINGS.
GOTHAM WAS ONLY HOURS AWAY.
TUP
DMAD NIGHT.
10

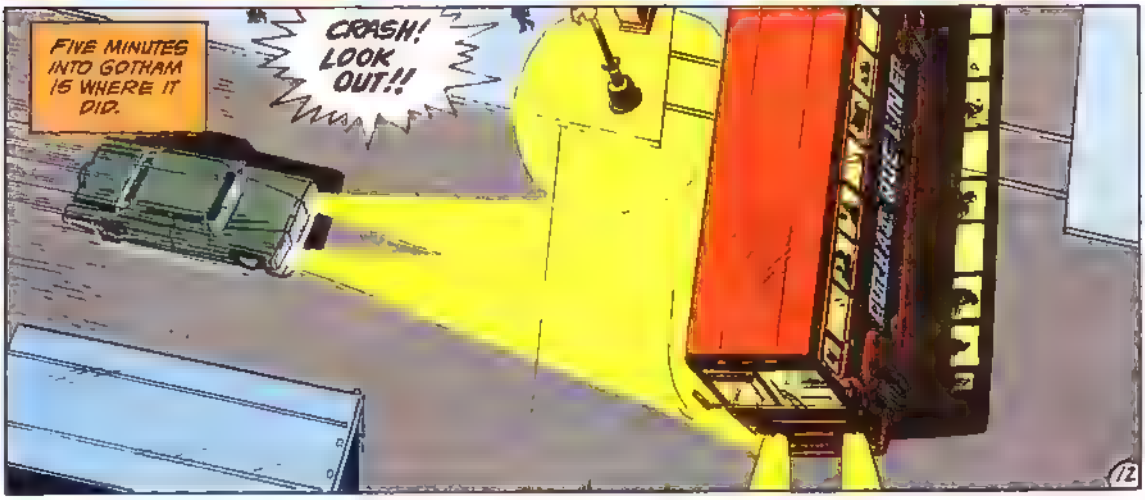

IT WAS BEST ON THE ROAD, EVEN BETTER THAN THE MOTEL ROOMS.
BOXED IN THE RUSHING NIGHT, JUST THE TWO OF US, SLASHES OF LIGHT THROUGH DARKNESS...
...READY TO CRASH AND BURN AROUND ANY CURVE WICKED ENOUGH TO SURPRISE US.
WHY, BURN?
WHY WHAT?
WHY WERE YOU ALREADY BAD?
FLTCH
THOUSAND REASONS
NAME ONE
KLIK
FLTCH
MY DADDY.
KLIK
HE STILL ALIVE?
FLTCH
NO.
THEN I GUESS WE DON'T NEED TO DETOUR.
HELL, CRASH, WE'RE ALREADY HERE.
GOTHAM

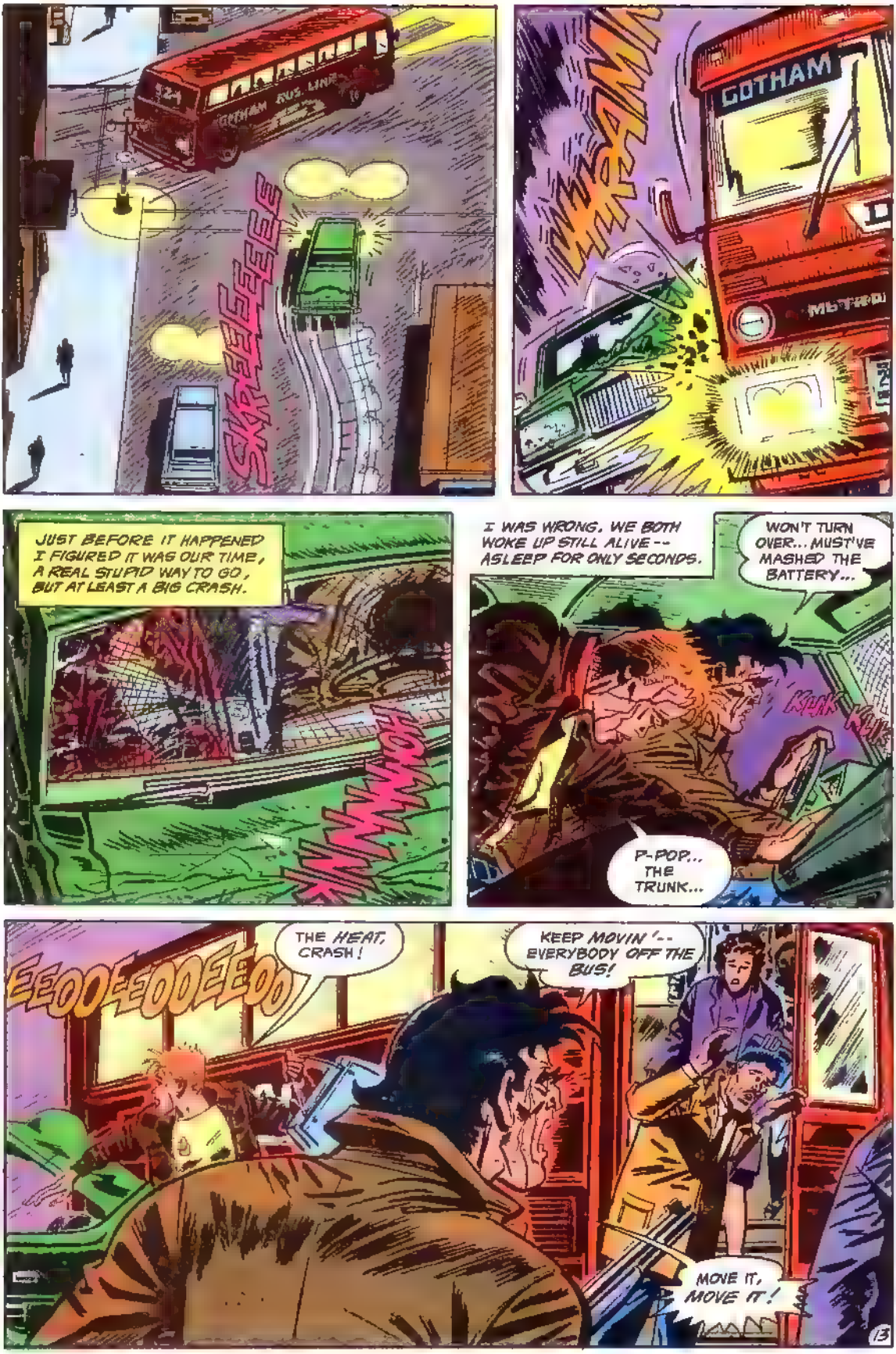

SOCIAL STUDIES.
WHY CAN'T IT BE SOMETHING LESS BORING, LIKE COMPUTER ALGORITHMS OR--
DEET. DEET


YEAH?
YOU CATCH A NAP?
RIGHT AFTER SCHOOL..
YOUR FATHER?
ASLEEP NOW.

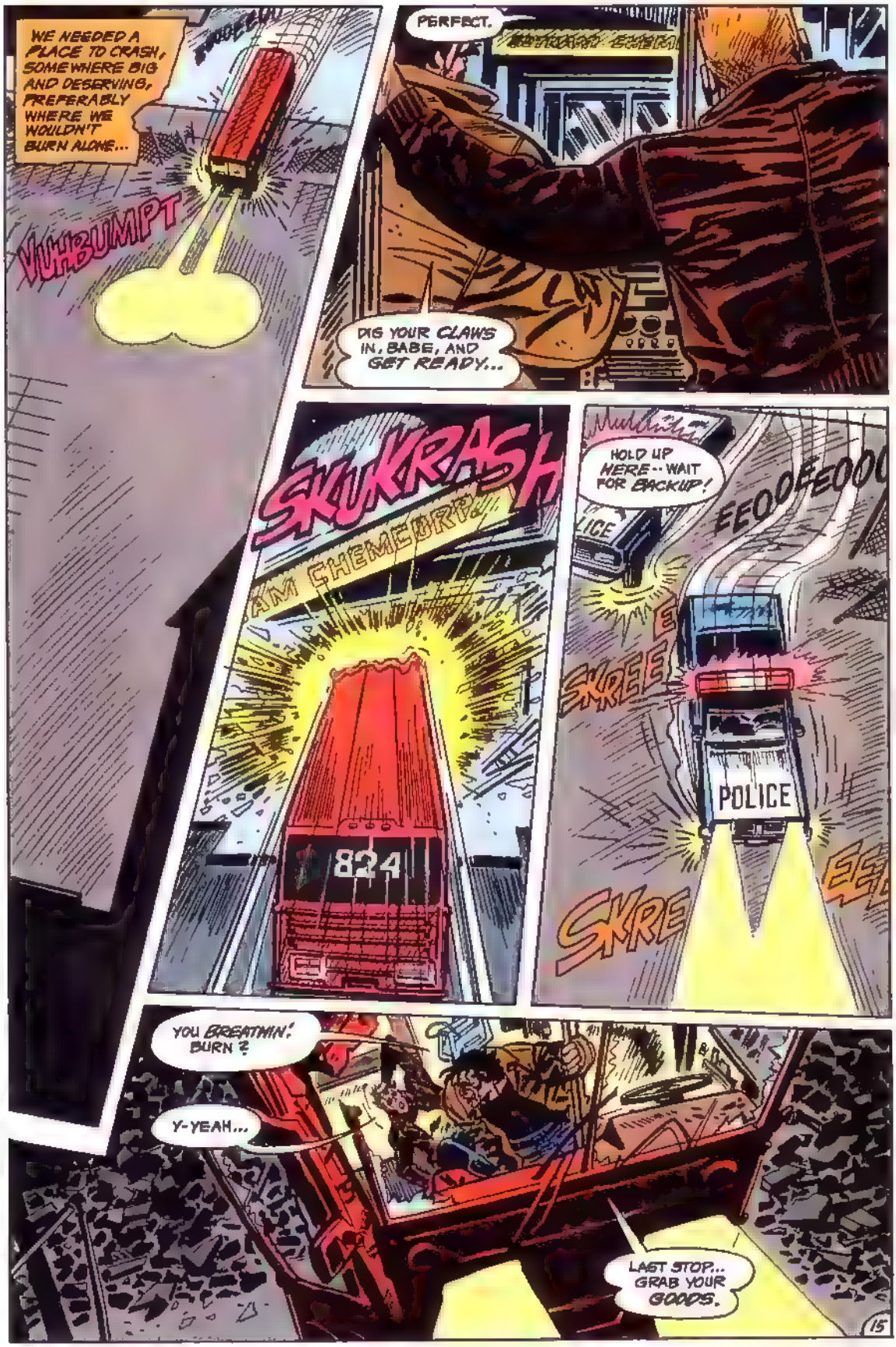

UP FOR A RIDE?
PRAYING FOR ONE.

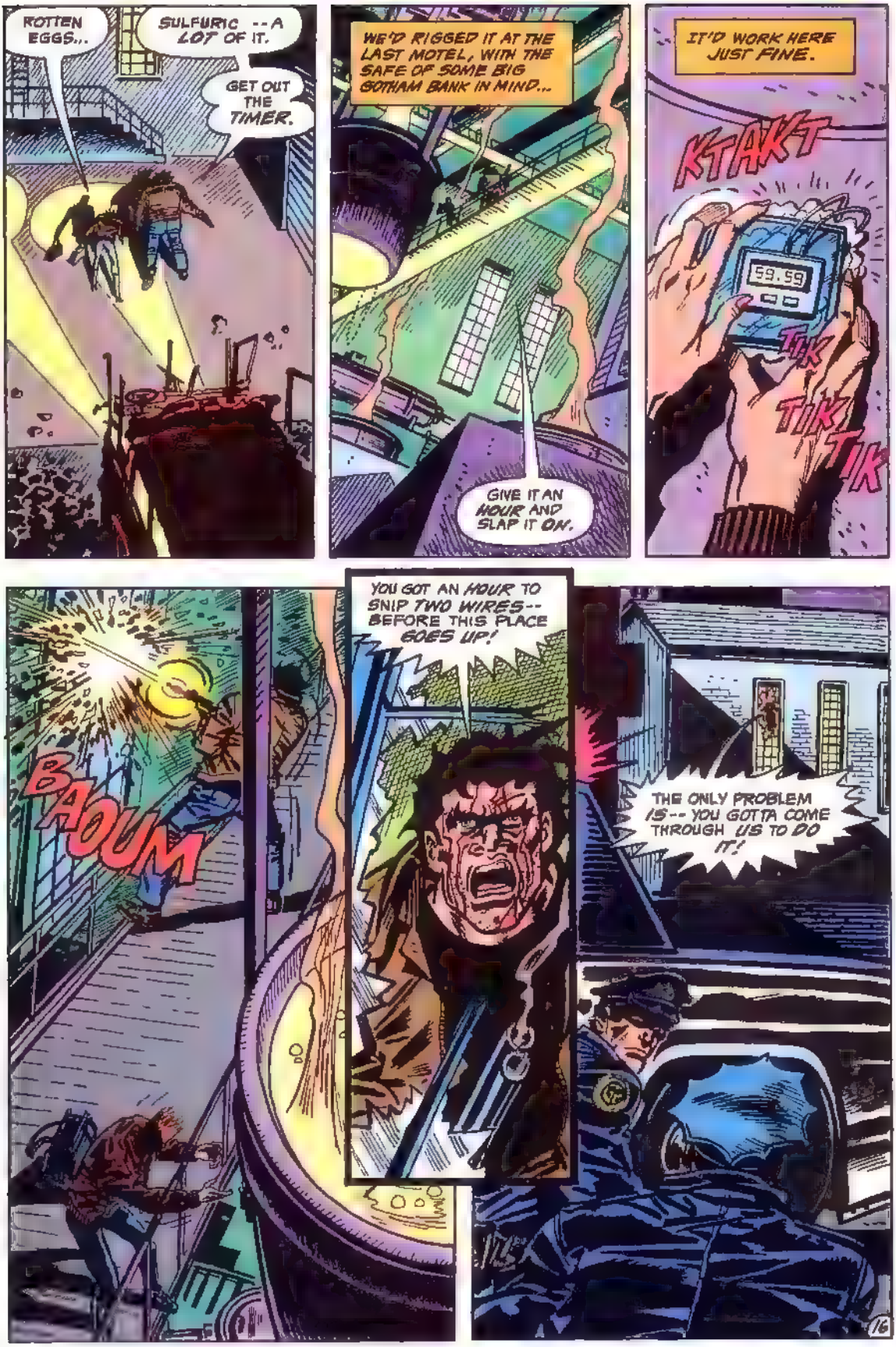

SOONER OR LATER, OF COURSE, CRASH'S DRIVING WAS BOUND TO GET US IN TROUBLE..


FIVE MINUTES INTO GOTHAM IS WHERE IT DID.
CRASH! LOOK OUT!!
12


SKREEEEEE
GOTHAM
KRAM
JUST BEFORE IT HAPPENED I FIGURED IT WAS OUR TIME, A REAL STUPID WAY TO GO, BUT AT LEAST A BIG CRASH.
KAWWW
I WAS WRONG. WE BOTH WOKE UP STILL ALIVE -- ASLEEP FOR ONLY SECONDS.
WON'T TURN OVER... MUST'VE MASHED THE BATTERY...
KUNK KUNK
P-POP... THE TRUNK...
EEOOEEOOEEOO
THE HEAT, CRASH!
KEEP MOVIN'-- EVERYBODY OFF THE BUS!
MOVE IT, MOVE IT!

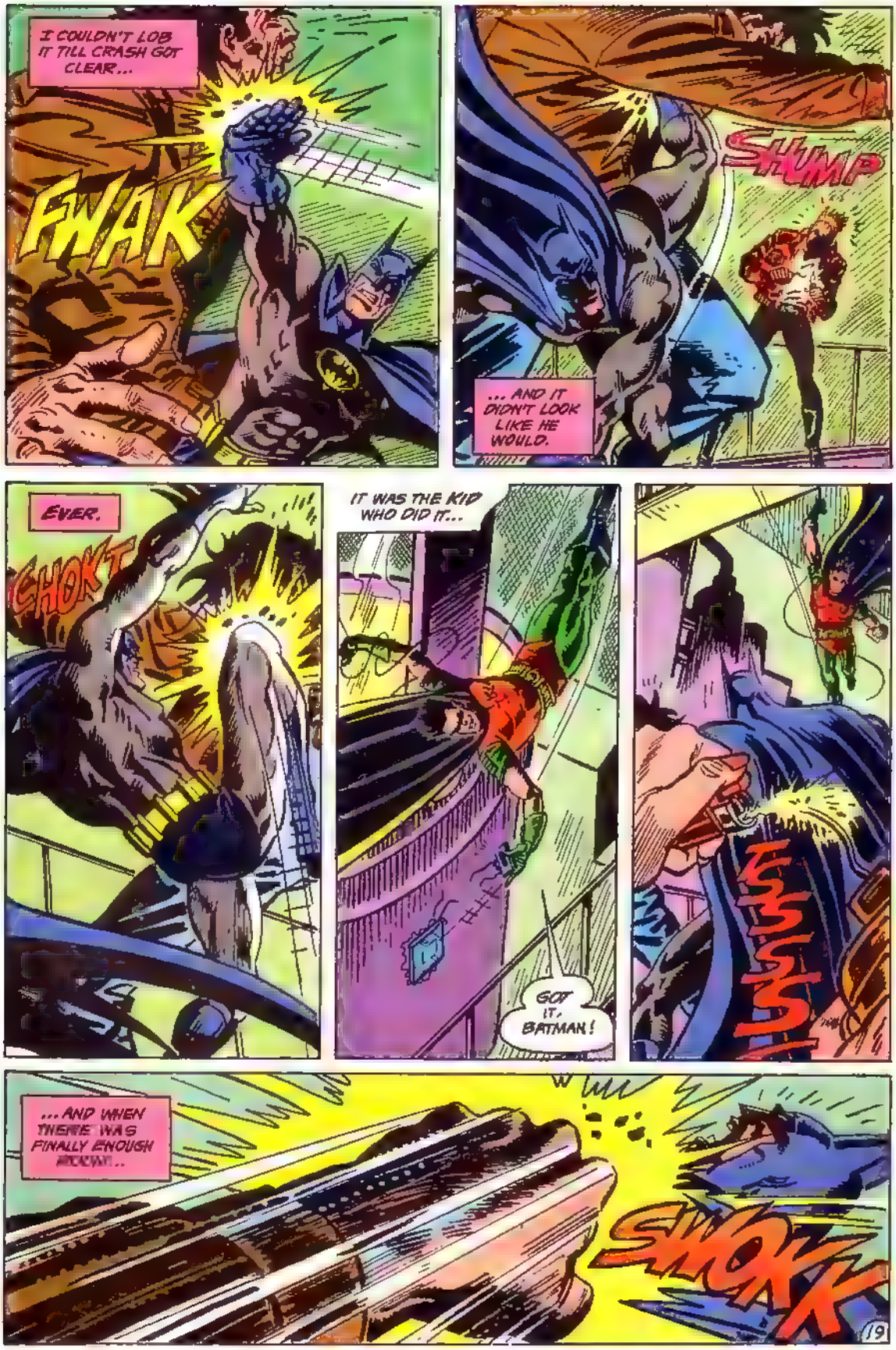
≥K'SSST≤ --COMMANDEERED BUS ON YORK, SOUTHBOUND PAST SHREVE STREET... ≥K'SSST≤
≥K'SSST≤--MALE AND FEMALE, MATCHING THE "CRASH AND BURN" BANKROBBERS... ≥K'SSST≤
SKREEEEEEE
THIS IS IT, HUH? GONNA CRASH FOR GOOD NOW-- FOR THE LAST TIME...
AND BURN IN HELL, BABE.
EEOOEEEEOOOE
AT LEAST WE'LL BE TOGETHER, CRASH.
OOEEOOEE
824
POLICE
BUT HE STILL DIDN'T LAUGH.

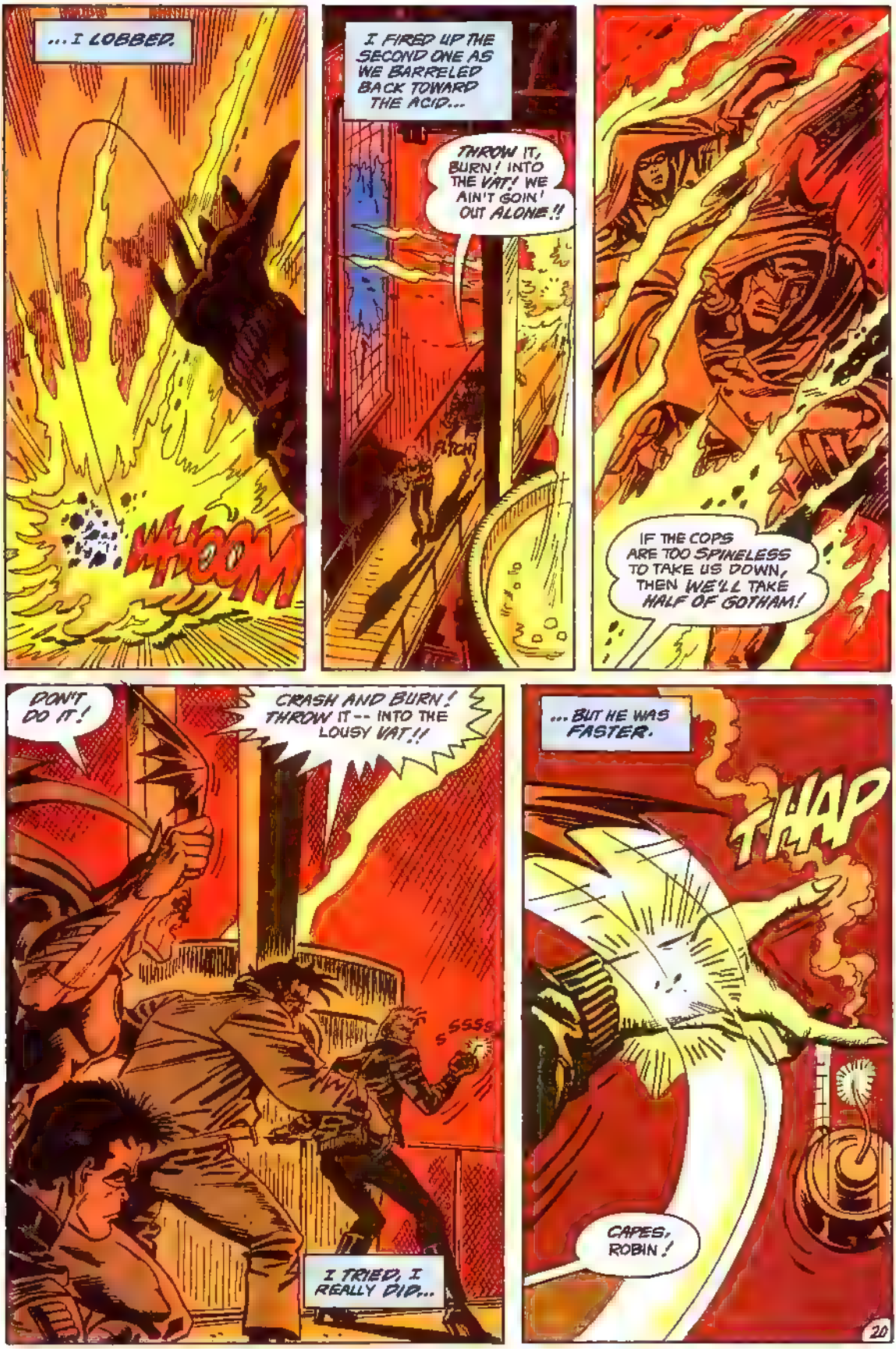

WE NEEDED A PLACE TO CRASH, SOMEWHERE BIG AND DESERVING, PREFERABLY WHERE WE WOULDN'T BURN ALONE...
VUHBUMPT
PERFECT.
DIG YOUR CLAWS IN, BABE, AND GET READY...
SKUKRASH
824
HOLD UP HERE-- WAIT FOR BACKUP!
EEOOEEOOO
SKREE
POLICE
SKRE
YOU BREATHIN' BURN?
Y-YEAH...
LAST STOP... GRAB YOUR GOODS.


ROTTEN EGGS...
SULFURIC --A LOT OF IT.
GET OUT THE TIMER.
WE'D RIGGED IT AT THE LAST MOTEL, WITH THE SAFE OF SOME BIG GOTHAM BANK IN MIND...
GIVE IT AN HOUR AND SLAP IT ON.
IT'D WORK HERE JUST FINE.
KTAKT
59.59
TIK
TIK
TIK
BAOUM
YOU GOT AN HOUR TO SNIP TWO WIRES-- BEFORE THIS PLACE GOES UP!
THE ONLY PROBLEM IS-- YOU GOTTA COME THROUGH US TO DO IT!
16

NOT MUCH MORE TO IT. WE SETTLED IN TO WAIT. IF THE COPS HAD ANY GUTS, IT WOULDN'T BE LONG.
--SECURITY GUARD WAS DOING HIS OUTSIDE ROUNDS --ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE BUILDING WHEN THEY CRASHED IN-- SO HE'S SAFE, BUT THE CITY...
THEY KNOW IT'S OVER, COMMISSIONER. THEY WANT US TO GO IN AND TAKE THEM DOWN--
--SO THEY CAN GO OUT IN A BLAZE OF "GLORY" RATHER THAN FACE PRISON.
TAKING A SLEW OF OUR PEOPLE WITH THEM. I DON'T LIKE IT, BUT THERE'S NO TIME TO EVACUATE... AND IF THAT CHEMICAL PLANT GOES UP, THE TOXIC FUMES WILL--
HOLD YOUR PEOPLE BACK, GORDON...
...UNTIL THERE'S NO OTHER CHOICE.
WE NEVER DID GET OUR TATTOOS, CRASH...
TIK TIK TIK TIK
HIS WAS GOING TO READ: "DIE YOUNG"... AND MINE WOULD'VE BEEN: "STAY PRETTY."
THEN WE'LL JUST LIVE THE TATTOOS, BURN, RIGHT TO THE STINKIN'...
TIK TIK
GIVE IT UP-- NOW!
MOVE, BURN!
THERE'S NO WAY OUT-- AND YOU KNOW IT!
TIK TIK TIK TIK
17

TIK TIK TIK TIK
PAF
CHAKT
I KNEW LONG BEFORE I SAW HIM...
IT'S NOT THE COPS, CRASH!
WHAT--?
BAOUM
IT'S JUST ONE MAN!
IT'S HIM, CRASH-- HIM-- AND HE DOESN'T KILL! HE REFUSES TO KILL!
WHAT ARE YOU--
FLICH
BAD IDEA TO COME NORTH, CRASH-- HARDLY HEAVEN... AND HIS TURF!
SHOKK


I COULDN'T LOB IT TILL CRASH GOT CLEAR...
FWAK
SHUMP
... AND IT DIDN'T LOOK LIKE HE WOULD.
EVER.
CHOK!
IT WAS THE KID WHO DID IT...
GOT IT, BATMAN!
SSSSS
... AND WHEN THERE WAS FINALLY ENOUGH
SHOKK


...I LOBBED.
WHOOM
I FIRED UP THE SECOND ONE AS WE BARRELED BACK TOWARD THE ACID...
THROW IT, BURN! INTO THE VAT! WE AIN'T GOIN' OUT ALONE!!
FICH!
IF THE COPS ARE TOO SPINELESS TO TAKE US DOWN, THEN WE'LL TAKE HALF OF GOTHAM!
DON'T DO IT!
CRASH AND BURN! THROW IT -- INTO THE LOUSY VAT!!
SSSS
I TRIED, I REALLY DID...
...BUT HE WAS FASTER.
THAP
CAPES, ROBIN!

NEITHER OF US LAUGHED THEN.
KTANK
YAAHHHH
AAAIIEE
FHWOOOM
IT WAS ALL WET HEAT AND WRAPAROUND PAIN...
... QUICK, REDSHOT DARKNESS...

WEEKS IN THE HOSPITAL, FUZZY, GRAY, AND ACHING... THEN THE HOLDING CELL, FULL OF ECHOES... ARRAIGNMENT, ALL WOOD AND BRIGHT LIGHT, A BLACK ROBE... AND FINALLY HERE, TO WRITE AND ROT.
"...TO WRITE AND ROT," HNH. MORE SARISH THAN YOUR ACCOMPLICE'S CONFESSION, BUT MATCHING IT IN EVERY IMPORTANT RESPECT.
YOU WANT TO SIGN IT NOW?
AS YOUR COURT-APPOINTED ATTORNEY, I REPEAT: YOU DO NOT HAVE TO SIGN THAT--
SHUT UP AND GO CHASE AN AMBULANCE.
FIND SOME OTHER CRASH-AND-BURN VICTIM.
Janet Byrne
AND THIS IS HOW WE KICKED BOREDOM... DIED YOUNG... STAYED PRETTY.
TWO-HUNDRED-SIXTY-NINE YEARS IN HERE...
...LIKE THIS!
HAHAHA
HA
END

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Hey, Bat Guys,

BATMAN #476 was a surprise-filled, action-packed story with character development, too. And speaking of surprises, look at the one on the cover! I started freaking out until I realized that Batman would never reveal his identity to anyone (right?) and that it was used as just an eye-catching device. It was a nice touch to have the "Exposed" book on Vicki's table. So, Batman is human. I guess he daydreams like the rest of us, only he never lets it show. It must be tough to share his alter ego with but a few people.

As usual, Scarface comes up with a violent plan to rid himself of his enemies. In doing so, he actually helps Batman in that the Winged One figures out that telling Vicki his identity could only endanger her.

My favorite scene is the one at the very end. The look on Brute's face is great! My compliments to Mr. Breyfogle for making him look that way.

Mattman
Arlington, VA

Dear Denny and Scott,

BATMAN #476 was an excellent conclusion to the Scarface story. Both Alan and Norm were their usual brilliant selves. Norm's rendition of the Bat-Signal on page 4 was gorgeous. Scarface is a terrific villain, and I hope we'll see more of him in the near future.

It seems, though, as if you guys have been watching too many *Dallas* reruns lately. The big revelation scene a mere daydream? Well...I am glad, however, that you decided against letting Vicki in on the secret. The Lois and Clark relationship in the SUPERMAN books is perfect, but a similar relationship between Bruce and Vicki wouldn't work. Poor Bruce is destined never to be happy in matters of the heart; he carries too much emotional baggage for that.

The only thing about this issue I didn't like was the cover. With all the beautiful covers to the BATMAN books we've had in the past year, this one was a letdown—just too ordinary and mundane. C'mon, Norm, you can do much better. I guess we've just been spoiled.

See you next issue.

Ingrid Nuernberg
Hermosa Beach, CA

We got some flak for the daydream sequence. Hey, we only said Bruce had decided to reveal his identity to Vicki, which was absolutely true. Of course, he also decided not to reveal it, but still... at least we put the daydream right at the beginning. We could have made the whole issue a daydream, and wouldn't that have been sleazy?

Dear Mr. Peterson,

Welcome aboard. Enclosed are a few minicomics I've created/co-created; I hope you enjoy them. Please pass along the extra copies to anyone around the office who feels they're not reading enough comics. Is that possible in a job like yours? Personally, I hope not; I want to make a career of this someday.

"The Return of Scarface" was an enjoyable three-parter; he (it?) and the Ventriloquist remain my favorite villains of the Wagner/Grant/Breyfogle era, and it'll be interesting to see how they influence Gotham's criminal activity in the coming months, since they weren't captured at the end. The only element missing from the adventure was Tim Drake; if ever a pair of villains deserved a Robin-esque remark, it's these two. I'd imagine they had a pretty interesting trial; they'd give new meaning to the term "mouthpiece."

Just curious: Were they inspired by the Michael Redgrave sequence in the 1945 film *Dead of Night*, or maybe the William Goldman novel/screenplay for *Magic*? Maybe both?

Finally, in response to yours and Melissa Page's inquiry about the cape weights (Bat-Signals lettercol, issue #476), I don't recall Batman mentioning using them, but the Joker utilized a similar accessory in his coat tails in issue three of his own book back in '75/'76, which he used on the Creeper. Is that what everyone 'round there was thinking of?

Oh, yeah—saw the *Batman Returns* trailer on *Entertainment Tonight*. Mr. Burton & Co. sure know how to push all the right buttons, eh?

Uh-oh...gotta go. The postman's coming...

On my way to Carnegie Hall
Michael A. Carroll
Columbus, OH

Dear Mr. Peterson,

First I would like to give you a reader's welcome to the Batwagon: Hello!

Next I would like to offer some comments on BATMAN #476. In some ways I think this is one of the best Batman stories I've read yet (I'm one of the post-Batman movies converts). There are two main reasons for this: Scarface and the Bruce/Vicki relationship.

When I read the first two parts of this story in BATMAN #475 and DETECTIVE #642, I looked at Scarface and thought, "Gee. A melodramatic puppet. How scary... not!" I also thought that Bruce's sudden, intense feelings for Vicki seemed somewhat contrived. Well, Bruce's love may still be a bit out of the blue, but I am completely turned around about Scarface.

Scarface *is* rather melodramatic; however, he is also one of the most nasty, cunning and *cold* villains that I have seen in quite a while—and I've been reading comics for 12 years. Here is a creature not content to simply go for the money, milk a few scores, or slam a couple of heroes on his way around town. He is not your present day, run of the mill, greedy crook. As his speech and dress show, Scarface is a guy who harkens back to the days of the Mafia: a time where business was business, honor was something completely different—and honor came *before* business. If there is a point to be made, if somebody slights you, then money is no object. Put that person back in his place, and make of him an example of what will happen to others who try to do the same. Of course, the scariest thing is that these cold, premeditated crimes are ordered...by a puppet. OK, OK, so they're really coming from the

Ventriloquist—but it never *looks* that way!!!...and perhaps that's the scariest thing of all. All of this in the hands of a capable writer can make for some very interesting stories to look forward to; crimes of honor/pride are usually much less obvious than crimes of greed, and, thus, more difficult for the hero to solve.

Now, about Bruce and Vicki: I am all for Bruce finding love and having a serious girlfriend. I am a diehard romantic, and Vicki seems just fine in this regard. As a realist, however, there was no way on earth that I believed that Bruce was actually going to reveal his identity to her, and I am very happy that you did not disappoint me. Of course, on the way to this non-occurrence, you provided both my romantic and realistic sides with some wonderful reading. Bruce daydreaming in the hospital waiting room was particularly nice—*sigh!* My mushy heart went pitter-pat with shock (was he *really telling her?*). Then, thinking back on it, I realized that this was a much softer—even fanciful—man that we were seeing here. Perhaps this Batman, today, is not quite as continually serious and hard-bitten as we have seen in the past?

Of course, the *best* part was at the very end, when Batman decides not to tell his secret. He sees Sarah almost lose her life foolishly because of her love for Jim and realizes that he does not want Vicki to share a similar fate. So he doesn't tell her—*sigh!* He's denying his own desires in order to protect the woman he loves. How romantic! Then the part of me with the B.S. degree in psychology starts wondering about repression and the role his subconscious had in this decision. After all, he loved his parents, and they were killed. The pain from this tragedy is what drove him to become the Batman. Later on, Dick Grayson was "lost" to him, and then there was the death of Jason Todd. These were very powerful events with long-lasting repercussions. I wonder if even *he* realizes how powerful they are? Of course, the fact that Bruce was able to fantasize about himself and Vicki earlier in the book might show that he is starting to grow past this earlier trauma. Only time and a lot of great stories will tell.

Here's to the future and more great stories!

Meredith S. Woodwell
Seattle, WA

P.S. While I'm opposed to having Bruce tell Vicki his secret, I've absolutely no qualms about Vicki discovering it for herself! After all, if Tim Drake, an untrained youth, can do it, why can't she? And what will she do once she knows...?

What's with this "Mr. Peterson" stuff? C'mon, folks, it's just me, the guy you people write to at least three times a month (once for each title, plus assorted special projects). Hey, if you can't call the lettercol guy by his first name, who can you?

Dear Scott,

"The Return of Scarface"—I liked it.

Woody
Virginia Beach, VA

Woody, you are truly a man of few words, all of them well-chosen.

OVER IN SHADOW OF THE BAT: On sale now, it's the third part of "The Last Arkham." Batman is in Arkham Asylum, the unwilling guest of Jeremiah Arkham, due to his killing a cop. Nightwing goes to break him out and learns the truth behind Batman's madness. It's "Crime and Punishment," by Alan Grant and Norm Breyfogle.

OVER IN DETECTIVE: It's "The Return of the Cluemaster." The Cluemaster's been released from prison, cured of his obsession with leaving clues for the Batman. He's now free to commit the crimes, but get off scot-free. So who's the mysterious figure sending clues to the cops? Find out in DETECTIVE COMICS #647, "Inquiring Minds," brought to you by Chuck Dixon, Tom Lyle and Scott Hanna, with a cover by Matt Wagner, on sale now.

NEXT ISSUE IN BATMAN: It's the long-awaited return of Black Mask. He's out of Arkham and he wants his old turf back. Can he regain his place as Gotham's top mob boss? The answer's in BATMAN #484, by Doug Moench and guest artists Tom Grindberg and Trevor Scott.

—Scott
Mr. Peterson's my dad...

From the Den

It grows on the corner of the editor's desk—a stack of dog-eared reproofs. Occasionally it snags the edge of his attention and he feels momentary remorse: *I should get to those. I should answer those. I should deal with those.* But the phone rings, or someone enters his office, or he realizes he's late for a meeting, or a conference call, or lunch with an artist, or a plane to some distant city, or any of a dozen other claims on his attention. So he, again, ignores the stack of unsolicited submissions, and feels a pang of guilt.

Because he remembers when he was a beginning writer. He knows how it feels to work on something, put all his heart and skill and talent into a manuscript, and send it out, and wait. For weeks, months, even longer. And get no reply. Or a form letter. Hateful experience. But now that he's on the other side of the process, he realizes that the unsolicited submissions pile—in publishing (universally and uncharitably) known as the "slush pile"—is absolutely the last thing an editor gets to. Not because he wants to ignore all those brave efforts in the envelopes, but because there's always something more important, some crisis.

Finally, one chilly night in late April, he sits at his word processor and he types:

I'm sorry. That's to all of you who have waited for me to reply. But you must understand: We are not a freelance market. Almost everything we publish is, in one way or another, commissioned—it has to be because we mostly work with continuing characters who are involved in complex continuities. Anything you send us is, of necessity, outdated by the time we receive it because it is based on what you read, and what you read is what we decided on six to eighteen months ago. We've made a lot of decisions since.

Therefore, please heed this: if you think you have an idea so good we'll have to accept it, write a query letter first. (You can probably learn how from various writers' guides available at the public library, if you don't already know.) Don't ever spend the hours and effort needed to create a complete script—not until you know the editor's needs, wants, requirements, taboos.

The moment the editor completes the two paragraphs above, he sees their flaw. If he can't spare time to read submissions, he can't spare time to answer query letters, either.

He gazes at the reflection of his lamp on the window, and silently, fervently, wishes all writers good luck and godspeed. Which is just about all he can do.

DENNIS